

ASKING FOR EYES: THE VISUAL VOICE OF SOUTHEAST AFRICA

APRIL 24 – JULY 9, 2006

More than 100 objects used in the daily life of the nomadic peoples of Southeast Africa are on display through Sunday, July 9 at the William D. Cannon Art Gallery. "Asking for Eyes: The Visual Voice of Southeast Africa" draws upon the splendid collection of the Escondido-based SANA Art Foundation. The works were made by the indigenous peoples now inhabiting the areas throughout Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho and South Africa, a region whose art and people have been misunderstood and neglected.

The Xhosa proverb *ucel amehlo* translates as "he is asking for eyes" (an audience), referring to someone who seeks esteem and admiration. Though often unnamed and individually unrecognized, these artists reveal an extraordinary people whose physical existence and spiritual sustenance are dependent upon their artistic achievements. Unlike established centers of culture in West and Central Africa, where peoples such as the Benin and Dogon have lived for great lengths of time in relatively rooted kingdoms and communities, the peoples of Southern and Eastern Africa are cattle-owning pastoralists who travel the land in search of new pastures for their herds. Their complex history consists of migrations rather than of settled societies. Reflecting this lifestyle, their artwork tends to be small because of the need to be portable and functional – a headrest rather than a bed, a food platter rather than a table.

In the daily lives of Southeast Africans, everyday objects such as staffs, spoons, and milk pails have continued importance. To demonstrate gratitude to the ancestral powers that have bestowed gifts of food upon the living, the Zulu (one of the groups represented in this exhibition) have developed eating patterns governed by strict rules of etiquette. Likewise, their colorful beadwork has a purpose deeper than simple ornamentation; it is also the outward sign of a person's status within his or her community. And Southeast African dolls are not just for play; they function as mediating fertility objects that connect the visible and invisible worlds.

Over 100 works of art will be featured in "Asking For Eyes," including exquisitely carved Zulu walking sticks, intricately beaded Ndebele fertility dolls, full-sized Xhosa costumes, fringed skirts and marriage belts, clay beer pots, oversized earplugs, elaborate church hats, petite Nguni puppets, animal-shaped Tsonga snuff containers, and ceramic sculptures by contemporary artists. More information about the collection and the SANA Art Foundation can be found at www.SANAartfoundation.com

A program of the Carlsbad Cultural Arts Office, the William D. Cannon Art Gallery is a focal point for arts and culture in San Diego's North County, offering a broad range of exhibitions, school and family programs, gallery tours, lectures and publications to the community. It is located at 1775 Dove Lane off El Camino Real and is open to the public Tuesdays through Sundays. For information on the exhibition and all Gallery programs, contact the Carlsbad Arts Info Line 760-434-2904 or the Gallery 760-602-2021 or visit www.carlsbadca.gov/arts.

RELATED EVENT: FOLK LIFE DAY

On Saturday, June 3, from 11:00 am until 3:00 pm, Folk Life Day offers expanded arts activities, with hands-on projects and an array of traditional African performances and demonstrations to complement "Asking for Eyes." The free event takes place in the Carlsbad City Library Courtyard.